

THORNS AND THISTLES

NO. 2299

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 12, 1893

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.”

Genesis 3:18

THIS was not the penalty which might have been pronounced upon Adam. This curse does not fall directly on him—it glances obliquely and falls upon the ground whereon he stands—“Cursed is the ground for thy sake.” It is not from materialism that a curse comes upon the spirit of man, but it is from the erring spirit that the curse falls upon the material creation. Let us notice this and learn from it the infinite mercy of God, in that, while the curse falls upon the serpent distinctly, and his head is bruised, yet upon Adam it comes, as I have said, obliquely. “Cursed is the ground for thy sake.”

“Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.” God, in His justice never goes beyond justice even in pronouncing His severest sentence, but here in this life He tempers His justice with great patience and longsuffering, “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

Another thing is very noticeable, that though the ground was now to bear thorns and thistles to Adam, yet he was to be above ground and alive to till it. Had the sentence been carried out to the full, a yawning grave would have opened at his feet and there would have been no more of Adam—but he was permitted still to live.

Now, whenever thorns and thistles spring up about your path, do not murmur. “Wherefore doth a *living* man complain?” When a felon lies in the dungeon and the sentence of death has been passed upon him, if his life is spared, he may be quite content to live on bread and water for the rest of his days. Thank God that you are not in hell. Thank God that life is still prolonged to you.

You are on praying ground and pleading terms with God, even though that ground may bring forth thorns and thistles to you. “He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” We are still spared. And though there are thorns and thistles springing up around us, yet still, that is a light punishment compared with what we really deserve to suffer.

And then, notice one thing more, how sweetness can be extracted from that which is sour. If the ground was to bring forth thorns and thistles to Adam, then he was still to live. Not only was he alive, but he was still to live on, for the Lord added, “And thou shalt eat the herb of the field.” Although the sentence took away from Adam the luscious fruits of paradise, yet it secured him a livelihood. He was to live—the ground was to bring forth enough of the herb of the field for him to continue to exist.

Albeit that henceforth all he ate was to be with the sweat of his face, yet he was to have enough to eat, and he was to live on. Thorns and thistles might multiply, but there would be the herb of the field for him, and he would be spared. The promises of God are often veiled by His threatenings, and if faith can only look beneath the rough covering of the message, something cheerful and hopeful may be found within.

Brothers and sisters, you will have trials, thorns also and thistles shall the ground bring forth to you, but your bread shall be given you, your waters shall be sure. You have been provided for until now, notwithstanding many straits and trials, and it shall be so to the end. The manna shall not cease till you eat the old corn of Canaan. Till you want no more, God will not cease to feed you all your life.

So, if the text tonight shall sound somewhat gloomy, and you expect a very thorny and thistly sermon, yet I trust that there will be much to cheer and comfort those of you who have found it true in your experience—"Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee."

I should like to say to those here who have their portion in this life, that it is not much of a portion. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to you and if this is all you have, you have a very poor pittance to live upon.

*"There is beyond the sky
A heaven of joy and love;"*

but beneath the sky there is no such heaven. Even for the godly there are thorns and thistles, but for you who are not godly, thorns and thistles are all that you have.

If you have no heritage on the other side of Jordan, in the land of the hereafter, in the dwelling place of the blessed, it were better for you that you had never been born. Notwithstanding all the transient delights that you now possess, they will only be as the crackling of thorns under a pot, soon over, and nothing but a handful of ashes left in everlasting darkness. Oh, that you would learn from this not to set your affection upon things below, but to be looking for a better and a brighter land, where the thorn never grows, and the thistle never springs up!

But now let us come to the handling of our text, thorny though it may seem to be.

I. And first, A GENERAL FACT is here stated.

This fact we will consider. Ever since that first sin of our first parents, this has been generally true of the whole human race, not only of the earth literally, but of everything else round about us, "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee."

It is so with regard to *the natural world*. This world is full of beauty. It is full of light. It yields a thousand pleasures; but still, it is full of terror. There is much, indeed, to distress the frail mortals who live in this world. Have you ever been to sea in a storm? Have you not felt as if nature were at war with you then?

Have you never been on the land in some tremendous thunderstorm, when the whole earth seemed to shake, and the skies were split with the fiery bolts? Ah, then you have felt that this world is not quite a paradise since man has become a sinner! The stars of heaven do not fight for him, but they sometimes fight against him.

There are many things in this world, with its stern laws, that make it a place that has not all the comfort that a creature might wish. He is a sinful creature, and although he does not suffer all the discomfort that he deserves, yet this world is changed from what it was when God placed Adam in it to delight himself in paradise.

As it is in the natural world, so it is *in the social world*. You go out into the wide world of trade and business, and I think you find that thorns also and thistles does it bring forth to you. You do not have a week's dealing, a week's work, a week's going to and fro in this world without getting a pricking thorn here and there.

If we do not all have to complain of this experience, I think we who are Christians will all admit that the world is not congenial to a believing man or woman. The society of the world is not helpful to a holy heart. To have to mix in it is rather a task for which we need much grace, as we cry, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

You cannot have much to do with the men of the world without finding that many of them are sharper than a thorn hedge—and you cannot go to and fro in the earth without discovering that you are surrounded by those who make thorns and thistles to grow up all around you. Be not surprised when this is the case, for it is only what your Lord foretold—"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

It is the same, also, in *the religious world*. We read, in the Book of Hosea, that they turned aside from God and set up altars. And afterwards it is said, “The thorns and the thistles shall come up on their altars.”

The worst thorns and thistles that ever wound my heart are those that grow in religious circles. To see God’s truth dishonored, to have the glory of Christ’s substitution denied, to hear doctrines preached which would be novel if they were not old errors newly vamped and brought forth from the oblivion in which they deserved to rot—and to see Christian people behave themselves as some of them do, having little respect to the name of Him whom they profess to serve, and bringing discredit on the sacred cause for which they ought to be willing to die rather than to cast a slur upon it—these are thorns and thistles that pierce us to the very heart.

You can neither live in the church nor live in the world without finding that this present state of life brings forth thorns and thistles to men, ay, to Christian men, too! Not only to the first Adam and to his seed, but to the second Adam and to His seed, this present state has this as one of its certain characteristics, “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.”

I will go a little further, and tread upon delicate ground. I am afraid that there are many of you who have felt that, even in the *little family world* in which you move, you are not left without trials. God, when he took away paradise as our home, gave us home to be our paradise. And if there be a place where all happiness is to be found, it is around the family hearth. “East and west, home is best.” “There is no place like home.”

Yet where is there a home without affliction? The dear child whom you love sickens and dies. Perhaps the wife or the husband may be taken away to the long home, or poverty comes in, or one whom you love dearer than yourself pines daily with constant sickness and frequent agony. No, we must not expect perfect peace, perfect felicity even in the home which is blessed with morning and evening prayer, where God locks up the door at night and draws the curtains in the morning—no, not even there, my dear friends, shall we be free from the curse that sin brought into this fair world. Still will this word follow us into the sacred precincts of our own dwellings, “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.”

And it is so if you get a little closer home still, to the microcosm or *little world of your own self*. There is no part of man which does not yield him its thorns. Many of us have a thorn in the flesh. Is there any part of the body which may not, if God so wills it, become the subject of disease and consequently the source of pain to us?

I know some whom God dearly loves—I know He loves them, for He favors them very highly—who nevertheless find that in the body of this flesh there are the seeds of corruption. There are the bitter wells of Marah by reason of sharp pain of body, and as to the mind itself, what mind is there that is fullest of faith and most joyful in the Lord, which is not naturally still the subject of grief?

There will come times of depression, seasons of apprehension, nights when the light of God’s countenance is withdrawn, or when, though we know that we possess the love of God, it is not shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost to the same extent as in our brighter hours. Yes, and even in the soul itself, by reason of the imperfection of our sanctification, from the fact that we are not so filled by the Spirit, and not so conscious of the abiding of the Spirit within us as we yet shall be, thorns also and thistles are brought forth to us.

I may be speaking to some who can say, with an emphasis, that they oftentimes find great crops of thistles springing up in their hearts, and they have to keep the sickle of sacred mortification going to cut them down, and they try if possible to dig them up by the roots. But thus it is—you cannot expect a perfect life of happiness in an imperfect world like this. No, your Savior carried the cross, and you will have a cross of some kind or other to carry after Him. “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.”

Now, still dwelling on this dreary fact, as we have it foretold in the text, let us learn from the text itself, first, that *trials will come spontaneously*. Nobody is so foolish as to sow thorns and thistles. I have

often wondered who that great fool must have been, who, being a Scotchman, desired to see the old Scotch thistle growing up in New Zealand and therefore sent a packet of seed out there to poison, with his precious thistle, that land where there were none before. I think the man who would venture to sow even one seed of a thistle in such a world as this, where thistles grow quite plentifully enough, must have gone a long way in folly.

But if, dear friend, you never cause trouble to others and do nothing that can bring trouble to yourself—and you will be a wonderfully wise man if that is the case—yet still, troubles will come of themselves. If you need a herb of the field that you are to feed upon, you must sow it. Your wheat and your barley, you must sow with care. As to the thorns and thistles, you need not take any trouble about sowing them—they will spring up of themselves spontaneously—and so will the afflictions and tribulations of this life come to you without any effort on your part.

And as they come spontaneously, *so trials will come unavoidably*. I care not how careful a man may be with his farm—he will find thorns and thistles springing up and needing to be destroyed. He may have ploughed and harrowed, and done his best to get rid of every thistle in autumn before it has seeded, and yet he cannot keep the troublesome things out—they will be sure to come.

So you may rest assured that troubles of heart, and troubles of body, and troubles of mind will come to you, watch and guard against them as you may. All the prudence and care, ay, and all the prayer and faith that you can summon to your help, will not keep you clear of these thorns and thistles. As they are spontaneous, so are they unavoidable.

To many, also, *trials are very abundant*. “Thorns also and thistles”—not *a* thorn and *a* thistle—but thorns and thistles, and plenty of them, shall it bring forth to you. If any of you are vexed with trial after trial, I pray you do not think it a strange thing—you are not at all alone in such an experience. Many of you, because of your troubles, will get alone, and say, “I am the man that hath seen affliction.”

Stop. I can find you another man who can equal you, and many women who can surpass you in their afflictions. The path of sorrow is trodden by thousands of feet—it is hard with traffic—but as it leads to the eternal kingdom when a believer’s foot is upon it—we need only rejoice to follow the footsteps of the flock and look upon our trials as the tokens that we are where the great Shepherd leads us. Thus we sing,—

*“Is this, dear Lord, that thorny road
Which leads us to the mount of God?
Are these the toils Thy people know,
While in the wilderness below?”*

*“’Tis even so, Thy faithful love
Doth thus Thy children’s graces prove;
’Tis thus our pride and self must fall,
That Jesus may be all in all.”*

Thorns and thistles come abundantly—and *trials come very variously*. It is not only one form of trouble, but other forms also—“Thorns also *and thistles*.” You may think that it is bad enough to be yourself ill, but to be poor as well, to have also a sick child, and to be assailed by a slanderous enemy, seems more than you can bear. Ah, well, you are to expect these things.

If you had only one form of trouble, perhaps you would grow used to it and therefore it might lose its effect. It is the very fact that it wounds that makes it useful to us. Solomon says, “By the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.” No tribulation for the present is joyous—if it were, it would not be tribulation at all.

If the rod does not make the child smart, what is the use of it? And if our troubles do not make us grieve, why then they are not troubles, and there is no room for grace to support us under them! We may expect to have trials of every sort and size, for they attend the followers of the Lamb as long as they are in the world that lies under this curse, “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.”

I think that, without straining the text, I may say that *trials will come very frequently*, for thorns and thistles seem to spring up very early in the morning, and very early in the spring, and very late in the autumn, and even far into the winter. When is there a time when a man in this world, ay, a Christian man, too, can be sure that he will be perfectly free from trouble?

And *trials come universally*. I have seen thorns and thistles on the tops of the Surrey Hills, growing by myriads, enough to seed a kingdom with them. And if you go down into the valley, into the poor man's little plot of ground, you will find thorns and thistles there. They grow in the gardens of Windsor Castle as well as in the backyard of your lodging house.

Thorns also and thistles grow anywhere—on dunghills or in conservatories. They seem to be universally scattered. The downy wings carry the thistle seed everywhere and it springs up in most unlikely places. If you think that other people are to be envied because of their freedom from trial, it is possible that if you knew more about them, you would find that they were to be pitied, and that your lot, after all, is much better than theirs.

Now, I am not going to say any more about this general fact, a fact which I suppose most of you know quite as well as I do, that thorns and thistles, trials and troubles, abound in this sin-cursed world.

II. But now, in the second place, THIS FACT HAS TO BE FACED—"Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee."

Now know this, you Christian people especially, know this, and then *it will prevent disappointments*. If you begin your Christian life imagining that, because you are a Christian, everything is to go smoothly with you and that you are henceforth never to have any more troubles, you will be bitterly disappointed when the thorns and thistles begin to spring up.

But expect them, look forward to them, and then, when they do come, half of their sting will be gone. You will say, "Well, when I took this farm, I knew that thorns and thistles would spring up, I calculated upon seeing them. Now that they have come up, to be forewarned is in a great measure to be forearmed—I shall not sit down and weep with bitter disappointment, for what I suffer is no more than I expected."

In the next place, the knowledge of this fact *will awaken gratitude*. If you have not a little lot of thorns and thistles, be thankful that you have not. And if you are saying to yourself, "Well, I trust that I am a Christian, but really I have not any very great trouble. I seem to sail on a mill pond, everything goes smoothly with me."

Thank God for it. It should tend to make you grateful if there is no bitter in your cup, when you might have expected that there would be. Then drink the sweet with gratitude and pour out a portion for the poor—and have sympathy with others who are not as favored in this respect as you are. This fact should arouse your gratitude.

In the next place, being forewarned that there will be thorns and thistles, *should brace up your soul to expect them*. The finest men in all the world are not to be found in the warm, genial climates, where the earth has only to be tickled with a hoe and it laughs with plenty. But the strongest and the most enterprising spirits have been found at the back of the north wind, where there are frosts and ice, and long, dreary winters, and men have a hard struggle for a livelihood. They become real men under that stern training.

Now, if there were no thorns and thistles, no struggles and no trials, should we have any brave Christians? Should we have any great and noble souls at all? When did the church yield her best men for her Lord's service? It was in *the persecuting times*, when they had to swim through seas of blood to hold fast the truth of Christ. These are silken days and we have wretched specimens of Christians everywhere—but if the times of persecution were to come once more, with the rough winds blowing, and the whole sea of the world tossed in tempest, we should then find brave sailors who would put the ship's head to the wind and ride safely over the stormy billows in the name of the Eternal God.

It is, perhaps, the worst thing that can happen to us to be without any kind of trouble. We do not grow in grace very quickly without trial—and we do not then develop the graces of the Spirit as we do when God sends the thorns and thistles to grow up around us.

Further, dear friends, the knowledge that we may expect the thorns and the thistles *should prevent our clinging to this world*. I should not want to stop here always, when all that I have as a warranty of this farm is this—“Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.” There is a land—

*“Where everlasting spring abides,
And never-withering flowers.”*

Oh, let my heart be set upon the world to come! Let me cheer my soul with the prospect of being forever with the Lord, where nothing can distress or annoy my glorified spirit forever. The Lord does not mean believers to be satisfied with this world. If you are His child, however fair your portion here, He means you to be always restless until you rest in Him and never to be fully satisfied until you wake up in His likeness. Wherefore, be thankful for the thorns and thistles, which keep you from being in love with this world and becoming an idolater, as so many of your fellow men are.

Does not the Lord intend by these trials and troubles to bring us to *seek after higher things*? Brethren, are there not many men who would have been lost if they had not lost their all? I talked with one, the other day, who said to me, “I never saw until I lost my eyes.” Another said to me, as I noticed that he had lost a leg, “Ah, sir, it was the loss of that leg that made me think and brought me to my Savior’s feet!”

Some of you cannot go to heaven with all your possessions and with all your prosperity. It will be necessary to have these things cut away. You are like a ship that is going down through overloading and you will have to be unloaded that you may float—and blessed is that hand of God which unloads you of many an earthly joy, that you may find your all in the world to come!

Affliction is God’s black dog that He sends after wandering sheep to bring them back to the fold. If that dog is after anyone here tonight, I pray you hie away to the Shepherd. Do not begin fighting the dog and trying to struggle with him, for you will get nothing by that, but run away to the Shepherd. One of these days you will be glad for all the rough treatment that the black dog gave you in the day of your tribulation.

Thorns and thistles shall the earth bring forth to thee, but if these bring you nearer to your God, they are the best crop the ground can grow. Remember what we sang just now,—

*“God in Israel sows the seeds
Of affliction, pain, and toil;
These spring up and choke the weeds
Which would else o’erspread the soil:
Trials make the promise sweet;
Trials give new life to prayer;
Trials bring me to His feet,
Lay me low and keep me there.”*

Once more, these thorns and thistles *should make us look to Christ to change all things around us*. The world will always go on bringing forth thorns and thistles until HE comes—and when He comes, our glory and delight—then “instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree.”

Only His grace and His own glorious presence can change this visible creation, as it shall be changed when, “the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock.” We look for that happy transformation, but as for moral transformations, they take place every day where Jesus comes. He constantly turns thorns and thistles into fir trees and myrtle trees. He makes what was our

sorrow to become the base of sweet content and out of all our griefs we gather gladness, blessed be His name!

If any of you say that this is a dreary subject, I want you to remember how much more dreary it was to Him than it ever can be to you, for when He was crowned on earth, the only crown He ever wore was a crown of thorns. This curse of the earth was on His head and wounded Him sorely. Was He crowned with thorns and do you wonder that they grow up around your feet?

Rather bless Him that ever He should have consecrated the thorns by wearing them for His diadem. Be willing to wear the thorn crown, too, and if that be not given you to prick your temples, and to make every thought an agony, be satisfied to go on treading a thorny path, for your Lord has been that way before.

The day shall come when all these thorns will make us sing more sweetly. The special music of some of the redeemed is due to their special trials.

“The deeper their sorrows, the louder they’ll sing.”

The transports of heaven will reach a height in those who have passed through great afflictions which they cannot attain otherwise. “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.” Wherefore, be not sorry that the earth shall bring forth thorns and thistles to you, for without these you could not come through these great tribulations and enter into so great and glorious a rest.

I have ended sooner, because of the baptism which is to follow, but I would to God that some of you here, who have no portion in the world to come, would lay my text to heart. So you have come to London, young man, and you attend the theater, and music halls, and so on! Well, they will bring forth thorns and thistles to you. That is the kind of ground where they grow very large and with very sharp thorns on them.

Oh, but you, my young friend, do not go to such places—you are getting on nicely in business! Yes, but you have no guarantee that it will always be so. Thorns and thistles will it bring forth to you, as well as to others. And suppose that you should prosper? Suppose that you should make £10,000, suppose that you should make much more than that? Do you not know that, with all that, there will come great care, and that, after all, there is no satisfaction in it, and that when all that makes success in life is summed up, apart from laying hold of eternal things, it is all nothing but smoke? Thorns and thistles for dying beds are often made out of riches. There are more thorns and thistles to the rich than to the poor when they come to die, if they have lived an ill-spent life.

Oh, sirs, if you could have all the world, it would only be a bigger plot of thorns and thistles for you without Christ. But if you get Him, if Jesus be your portion, then if your trials should be heaped up as high as heaven, you would not mind, for Christ would come and be with you in the worst of them—and you would still rejoice and glory in tribulation also—and your tribulation would work in you patience, and patience experience, and that experience would work in you the likeness of Christ, and so bring you nearer heaven!

It matters not to the believer what form his life may take when once Christ has become his life, and it will not matter much to you who are not saved what form your life takes if you continue without the Savior—it will be death all the same and it will land you in eternal death.

Oh, God, grant that we may never settle down upon this thistle plot and try to make it to be our heritage, but may we find our portion in the Lord Jesus Christ! I wish all of you that blessing, for His name’s sake. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

GENESIS 3

Verse 1. *Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?*

He began with a question. How much of evil begins with questioning! The serpent does not dare to state a lie, but he suggests one—"Has God refused you all the fruit of these many trees that grow in the garden?"

2-3. *And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.*

Eve had begun to feel the fascination of the evil one, for she softened down the Word of God. The Lord had said concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." A little of the spirit of doubt had crept into Eve's mind, so she answered, God has said, "Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."

4-5. *And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.*

The serpent insinuated that God selfishly kept them back from the tree, lest they should grow too wise and become like God Himself. The evil one suggested ambition to the woman's mind, and imputed wicked designs to the ever-blessed and holy God. He did not say any more—the devil is too wise to use many words. I am afraid that the servants of God sometimes weaken the force of the truth by their verbosity, but not so did the serpent when he craftily suggested falsehoods to Mother Eve—he said enough to accomplish his evil purpose, but no more.

6. *And when the woman saw—*

Sin came into the human race by the eye, and that is the way that Christ comes in, by the eye of faith, the spiritual eye. "Look unto me, and be ye saved," is the counterpart of this word, "When the woman saw—"

6. *That the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*

This was a distinct act of rebellion on the part of both of them. It may seem a small thing, but it meant a great deal. They had cast off their allegiance to God. They had set up on their own account. They thought they knew better than God and they imagined they were going to be gods themselves.

7. *And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.*

All they had gained by their sin was a discovery of their nakedness. Poor creatures, how the serpent laughed as his words were fulfilled, "your eyes shall be opened"! They were opened indeed, and Adam and Eve did know good and evil. Little could they have dreamed in what a terrible sense the serpent's words would come true.

8. *And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day:*

No doubt, when they had heard the voice of the Lord before they had run to meet Him, as children do to a father when he comes home "in the cool of the day." But now, how different is their action!

8. *And Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.*

What fools they were to think that they could hide themselves from God! The fig leaves were to hide their nakedness and now the trees themselves were to hide them from God.

9-11. *And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said,*

Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

God comes to judge His fallen creature, yet He deals kindly with him. The Lord will have it from his own lips that he has offended—He summons no other witness.

12. *And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.*

This is a clear proof of his guilt, first, that he throws the blame on her whom he was bound to love and shield. And next, that he throws the blame on God Himself—“The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree.” Ah, me, what mean creatures men are when sin comes in and shame follows at its heels!

13. *And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.*

How often we throw the blame of our sin on the devil, who certainly has enough to bear without the added guilt of our iniquity! What Eve said was true, but it was not a sufficient reason for her sin. She should not have been beguiled by the serpent.

14-15. *And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

Here was the first proclamation of the Gospel. Strange to say, while God pronounces a curse upon the enemy of mankind, He is uttering a blessing upon the whole of those who belong to Christ, for HE is that seed of the woman, and all that belong to Him are a simple-minded, child-like people—children of the woman. Their opponents are the seed of the serpent—crafty, cunning, wise, full of deceit—and there is enmity between these two seeds.

Christ is the Head of the one seed, and Satan is the head of the other. And our Lord Jesus Christ has had His heel bruised and He suffered in that bruising of His heel. But He has broken the head of the dragon, He has crushed the power of evil, He has put His potent foot upon the old serpent’s head.

16-18. *Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;*

Adam had been accustomed to eat of the fruit of the many trees of paradise. Now he must come down and eat “the herb of the field.” He is lowered from royal dainties to common fare.

19. *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground;*

“You shall get your life out of the ground till you yourself shall go into the ground.”

19-21. *For out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.*

This was a very significant Gospel action. The Lord took away from Adam and Eve the withered fig leaves, but put on them the skins of animals, to show, in symbol, that we are covered with the sacrifice of Christ. The giving up of a life yielded a better covering than the growth of nature—and so today the death of Christ yields us a better covering than we could ever find in anything that grew of our poor fallen nature. Blessed be God for thus thinking of us when providing raiment for our first parents!

22. *And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:*

That would have been a horrible thing, for man to be incapable of death—and so to continue forever in a sinful world. It is by passing through death that we come out into the realm of perfectness.

23-24. *Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.*

*“O, what a fall was there, my countrymen,
Then I, and you, and all of us fell down;”*

while sin triumphed over us. Yet even the fall by Adam’s sin was not without the promise of a gracious recovery through the last Adam, the Lord from heaven. Well does Dr. Watts set forth the contrast between the fall of the angels and the fall of man,—

*“Down headlong from their native skies
The rebel angels fell,
And thunderbolts of flaming wrath
Pursued them deep to hell.*

*“Down from the top of earthly bliss
Rebellious man was hurl’d
And Jesus stoop’d beneath the grave
To reach a sinking world.”*

He took not on Him the nature of angels, but He took our nature and died in our stead. May we trust to His death to bring us life and thereby be saved from the consequences of the fall!

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—757, 750, 749

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